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NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on October 26.

## Remarks at a Reception for Senator Edward M. Kennedy

October 21, 1999

Thank you. Is this a rowdy crowd or what? [Laughter] You know, I'm not used to showing up and being the straight man. [Laughter] This is a very emotional moment for me. [Laughter] When I was in the 10th grade, Ted Kennedy was in the Senate. [Laughter] And when I retire from two terms as President, Ted Kennedy will be in the Senate. [Laughter] And I resent it. [Laughter]

I don't know what Patrick's doing here. He's supposed to be raising money for House Members. [Laughter] You may have cost us four seats tonight, with all this money going here. [Laughter] Actually, he got an excused absence from Master Gephardt to come here tonight, and I'm grateful.

Let me say a couple of words seriously. I am genuinely honored to be here. I love Edward Kennedy. And I am something of a student of the history of our country. I just—one of our guests tonight gave me a biography of Chester Arthur, because I don't own one. I've got this great—I've read all about all of our Presidents; I've studied the history of the United States Congress.

I do believe that any fair reading of that history would say that Edward Kennedy was one of the four or five most productive, ablest, greatest United States Senators that ever served this great Republic of ours.

And I am grateful for this family's commitment to public service. There is no question—I was a Governor for 12 years, and I care a lot about these issues that the States deal with. There's no question that Kathleen has done more with the job of Lieutenant Governor than any person in her position in the United States of America, and that Maryland was the first State—thanks to her—to make community service a part of the requirement of being a student in the public schools. And that is very, very important.

And you know, I said I was in the 10th grade when Ted went to the Senate. Patrick looks like he's in the 10th grade—[laughter]—and yet, here he is. You know, he's been here 3½ months or something in the Congress, and he's already the head of the campaign committee. [Laughter] So I think that there is no limit to what he can and will do in the Congress. And you already heard him say he's trying to recruit one of his brothers—I mean one of Kathleen's brothers—to run for the Congress in Illinois. So we are grateful for the service of this Senator and this family. And, you know, Vicki is my neighbor from Louisiana, so they've shown a certain affinity for Southerners. [Laughter]

I want you to know something else, too, that I'm grateful for. In January of 1992 Jackie came to a fundraiser for me when I was running fifth in New Hampshire, and reached out to my wife and to my daughter in ways that I will never forget. One month after, her son had also come to an event for me, when I think I was running sixth in New Hampshire. [Laughter] So we've had this marvelous friendship.

Sargent Shriver was, yesterday, with me when we celebrated the fifth anniversary of AmeriCorps. We've had 150,000 young people in 5 years serve their country in citizen service, earned some money to go to college. We've done a lot of things together.

But the reason that you're here, and the reason you ought to be here, is that a lot of big decisions are going to be made in the next few years. And it'll make a big difference if Ted Kennedy is in the Senate. We also have a genuine, legitimate chance to be in the congressional majority again. And that's very important.

But I said in '92 if people would vote for me, I would try to reinstitute the basic values of opportunity, responsibility, and community. I said that we would try some new ideas that would transform our country. I said in '96, "If you'll reelect me, I'll try to build this country a bridge to the 21st century." I might have said, in starker terms, that this country was in tough shape in '92, and drifting and divided. A lot of people have forgotten that.

And I feel that we have sort of turned around, just like a big ship in the middle of the ocean, and we're steaming in the right

direction. Any statistic I could quote—we have the longest peacetime expansion in history, 19½ million new jobs, the highest homeownership ever. And just listen—when people ask you why they ought to be for the Democrats—we have the lowest unemployment in 29 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the lowest crime rate in 26 years, the lowest murder rate in 31 years, the first back-to-back surpluses in 42 years, all with a Government that is the smallest it's been since John Kennedy was President in 1962, 37 years ago. And Ted Kennedy was at the center of every decision that was made that made that possible. And you should be proud of that.

Now, next time you meet somebody that says they're going to vote for a Republican for the Congress or the White House, you give them those statistics and ask them what their answer is.

But what I want to tell you is we can build that bridge. But the people of this country are going to make some profound decisions. And there are profound differences. Are we really going to do what the Republicans want, and give all the non-Social Security surplus away in a tax cut? If they get the White House and Congress, we will.

Are we going to meet the challenge of the aging of America? The number of people over 65 is going to double in 30 years. I hope to live to be one of them. [Laughter] We'll have two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. We have a chance and an obligation to save Social Security, to reform Medicare, to restore some of the cuts we put in that were excessive 2 years ago, to add a prescription drug benefit, and to take care of the elderly of this country, which all of the young people should favor, because it means they won't have to do it and they'll have the money to raise our grandchildren. It's a big issue.

Are we going to take seriously our responsibility to the largest and most diverse group of students in our history, and modernize their schools and connect their classrooms to the Internet, and give them teachers so they'll have small classes with well-trained teachers in the early grades, and give them the after-school and the summer school pro-

grams they need? Or are we going to squander that opportunity?

Are we going to do something, finally, for the people and places that have been left behind in this recovery? Yes, we've got the lowest poverty rate in 20 years; that's the good news. The bad news is that there's still about 20 percent of our kids in poverty and a higher percentage of minority children. And we have a chance to bring the benefits of enterprise to people who want to work in places left behind. Are we going to do it or walk away from it?

And I hope to persuade Congress that—well, we can do all this and still, over the next 15 years pay down our debt until we're debt-free for the first time since 1835. And I think another one of your nephews, Joe Kennedy, used to talk about this when he was in Congress: the liberal party ought to be for doing that, because it means lower interest rates; more jobs; more investment; higher incomes; lower costs for home loans, for student loans, for car loans, and for credit cards. It means average people will live better. And I think we ought to do it, since we can meet our other responsibilities as well.

These are just some of the big opportunities that are out there that we're for. And there are big differences on whether we ought to have a Patients' Bill of Rights; big differences on whether we ought to continue to have responsible measures to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and kids.

We are 6 months past that Columbine massacre, and we still haven't acted to close the gun show loophole. And the same crowd that's blocking it said, when we passed the Brady bill in 1993, that the crooks don't get their guns at gun shops; they get them at gun shows and flea markets; you won't stop anybody with the Brady bill. Well, 400,000 stops later, they have quit making that argument, but now they don't want us to do a background check where they said the crooks were buying the guns.

And let me tell you something else that you ought to say—I want people to use this. This is not just a matter of crime. The accidental death rate of children from guns in the United States is 9 times higher than the combined death rate of the next 25 biggest industrial countries in the world. Let me say

that again: 9 times higher than the next 25 industrial countries combined—together.

So we've still got a lot of work to do. And I guess what I want to tell you is, I'm grateful that I had a chance to serve. I'm not running for anything. I'm here—I kind of wish I were, actually, but I'm not. *[Laughter]* And I'm here, I'm here because I care about my country. I care about my daughter's world. I care about the grandchildren I hope to have someday. And we've turned this country around.

In my lifetime, we have never had a chance like this. When President Kennedy and President Johnson served, we had a good economy, but they had to deal with the crisis of civil rights and the problems of the cold war.

We have an opportunity not just to eliminate legal discrimination—which we ought to continue to do with the “Employment Non-Discrimination Act” and all of that—but we have an opportunity to create the world of our dreams.

That's why I was upset about the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and I'm mad that we're not paying our U.N. dues, and why I think we ought to pay off the debt of the world's poorest countries—because we can create the world of our dreams, at home and beyond our borders. And there is nobody better qualified to be the conscience and the heart and the tactical leader of that struggle than Senator Kennedy. Nobody. This is a big deal.

So I'm telling you, I want you to feel this. I am grateful for having had the chance to serve. I am grateful that all these numbers I can reel off, and they sound so good. But the truth is, nobody thinks we have given everyone opportunity. No one thinks we have really built one America. No one believes this country is as safe as it can be. No one believes we've met all our obligations to the environment. No one believes that we have met our obligations or seized our opportunities in the world toward which we're moving.

So beyond all the issue, you just have to keep this simple idea in mind: This country is in good shape, and it is moving in the right direction. And for the only time in my lifetime, as a people, we have a chance to shape

the future of our dreams. It will only happen if we elect the right dreamers.

Thank you for being here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:52 p.m. in the a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend of Maryland; Vicki Kennedy, wife of Senator Edward M. Kennedy; Sargent Shriver, first Director of the Peace Corps; and former Representative Joseph P. Kennedy II.

### **Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner**

*October 21, 1999*

Thank you. I will be brief, because I want to spend most of our time in a conversation. But I would like to say a few things.

First, I want to thank Senator Kerry for once again opening his home. I was here not very long ago with at least some of you who are here. I want to thank him for his genuine commitment to modernizing our party and to making it an instrument of progress and an instrument for bringing our country together. And I'm very grateful for the truly exceptional effort he's made.

On the way in, Joe Andrew, our DNC chair, said that John Kerry had done more personally than any other Member of the Congress to try to help modernize and strengthen our party, in the last few months, particularly. So I thank you for that. And I thank Teresa in her absence, and I think she did the right thing to fulfill her responsibility. *[Laughter]* We always say we're for opportunity and responsibility, and—*[laughter]*—she's had a fair share of one and discharged the lion's share of another. And we appreciate that.

I want to thank Governor Romer and Beth Dozoretz and all of the other people who are here from the Democratic Party and all of you.

Let me just say—I want to tell you a story. A lot of you know that Hillary and I—because of her, not me; it was her idea—have had a series of evenings at the White House called Millennium Evenings, this year, which we have primarily disseminated to the public at large through the Internet. It's been covered by C-SPAN and occasionally by CNN